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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 001978

SIPDIS

DUBAI FOR CG
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SUBJECT: INTERNAL SECURITY IN SINAI--AN UPDATE

REF: A. CAIRO 707 (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. 04 CAIRO 9275 (NOTAL)

[1](#)C. 04 CAIRO 8590 (NOTAL)

[1](#)D. 04 CAIRO 7851 (NOTAL)

Classified by DCM Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The effects of the October 7, 2004 terror bombings continue to ripple through the Sinai Peninsula, even as tourism rebounds. In January the security services and tribal leaders formally agreed to work together against criminal activities by tribesmen. In early February, a combined force of security personnel and irregular Bedouin militia/guides cornered and killed three suspects linked to the bombing near the town of Ras Sidr. These killings appear to have accounted for fugitive suspects that the GOE publicly identified in October 2004 as responsible for the terror attacks, but the issue of mass detentions of others connected to the investigation continues to raise questions. At the same time, local citizens and human rights groups have kept up their criticism of the GOE's alleged mass detentions of terror suspects, including through vocal and disruptive protests in the northern Sinai capital of Al-Arish. Although charges of human rights abuses, as reported in a February report by Human Rights Watch, do nothing to boost the GOE's human rights credentials, the apparent development of closer security cooperation between the GOE and the Sinai Bedouin tribes may have significant security-related benefits in the future. End summary.

New Security Pact Between Bedouins and GOE...

[1](#)2. (SBU) In January, Sinai Bedouin tribal elders negotiated and signed a "Pledge Document" which committed the Bedouin leadership to report to the authorities any criminal activities by tribal members. Previously, the Bedouin dealt internally with law-breaking, a process that was unsatisfactory to the GOE. Some Bedouin have voiced discomfort with the new agreement, arguing that it undoes a centuries-old system of tribal justice and threatens to spark additional conflict. In addition, the GOE has sought to play a larger role in the selection of tribal leaders, replacing the traditional tribal consensus system with a process that "recommends" GOE approved leaders.

and the Security Forces Kill Three Suspects

[1](#)3. (SBU) Local press and wire services indicate that security forces, assisted by armed Bedouin guides, in early February killed three terror bombing suspects (Hammad Gaman Gomah Tarabeen, Mohammad Abdel Rahman Badawi, and an unidentified third man) in gun battles near Ras Sidr on Sinai's western coast, after the trio's suspicious activity attracted the attention of a camel herder who notified police. One policeman died and several were wounded in the fight with the suspects. A February 5 account asserted that 600 security personnel continued to pursue an additional three suspects, and that 100 armed Bedouin were assisting police. Another wire service report on February 6 said that Sheikh Attiyah al-Kibriti led the Bedouin forces working with the GOE. (Note: In late October 2004, just weeks after the terror bombings, the Interior Ministry (ref D) identified the suspects in the bombings as nine Sinai residents, including two men who had died in the Taba blast, five who were arrested in October, and two who were still at large. Since the press reports in early February about the killing of the additional three suspects, the GOE has made no public announcements about the status of the investigation. End note.)

Bedouin Women and Human Rights Watch Slam the GOE

[1](#)4. (SBU) In a February 22 press conference in Cairo, Human

Rights Watch (HRW) unveiled its latest report on Egypt, "Mass Arrests and Torture in Sinai." The report largely reiterated the assertions of Egyptian human rights groups (reported ref C) first made in November 2004. The major contribution of the HRW report appears to be consolidating the multiple strands of allegations into a coherent English-language account of the detentions, supplemented by interviews with approximately 20 recently released detainees and two alleged victims of torture. The report's release generated modest coverage by local opposition papers and the international wire services, but it does not seem to have sparked any major new interest in the detentions.

15. (SBU) Subsequent to the release of the report, female relatives of men alleged to be detained by the GOE have conducted protests in Al-Arish. In late February, scores of angry women, clad in the enveloping black abayas favored by Bedouin women, stormed into a local council meeting in Al-Arish attended by North Sinai Governor Ahmad Abdel Hamid to demand official action regarding their detained men-folk. At the Governor's direction, the police did not break up the demonstration. The women presented a list of 90 names of detainees to the Governor, and he agreed to attend to the issue. (Note: Ref A described a protest that ended in teargas and arrests in Al-Arish in January. End note.) On March 4, Al-Jazeera reported that the GOE had recently released 11 detainees, in addition to 90 who were released in January. Most recently, on March 11 after Friday prayers in Al-Arish, according to wire service reports, 400 protestors, including 200 women, clashed with police who arrested five protestors. The latest protests including charges that the police were using torture against detainees.

Comment: Redrawing the Internal Security Map in Sinai

16. (C) The total number of detainees linked to the investigation remains uncertain due to the GOE's customary lack of transparency in such matters. Our best assessment is that the total number detained is significantly less than the several thousand claimed by HRW and others, but we also note that past GOE practice in comparable security cases has been to question and detain large numbers of people believed to have any knowledge of particular security cases. The persistence of the women in Al-Arish as they demand the release of their relatives provides a useful indicator of the scale of the detentions.

17. (C) The Bedouin have historically had an uneasy relationship with whatever central government has held sovereignty over the Sinai. Since the return of the peninsula from Israel to the GOE in 1979, many Bedouin, as well as independent analysts, have argued that GOE development policies have disadvantaged the Bedouin inhabitants by favoring Egyptian investors and immigrants from "the Wadi," i.e., the Nile Valley. This situation led to considerable resentment of Cairo by some Bedouin, and is used by some analysts to explain Bedouin involvement in crime (including smuggling of narcotics, stolen vehicles, weapons, and people). In December, a senior police official in Sinai investigating Bedouin involvement in a multiple homicide and robbery commented to a visiting USG delegation that the only good Bedouin was a dead Bedouin. This offhand remark did not, of course, reflect official policy, but it does suggest the depth of the tensions between the Sinai Bedouin and Egyptian officialdom. Similarly, Bedouin in Sinai, especially those residing in the trash-strewn shanty settlements outside towns like Nuweiba and Dahab, where economic life revolves around upscale tourist resorts, have expressed their deep resentment of GOE development.

18. (C) As noted in ref B, the October 7 terror bombings in Taba and Ras Shaitan seem to have energized the GOE to re-examine the internal security situation in Sinai. The wide-ranging detentions, as well as the security pact and the tactical cooperation between tribal guides and the security forces, are evidence of a new attention by the GOE to ensuring the security of the peninsula. Whether or not these tough measures succeed in the long run will be determined by a host of related issues, including the degree to which the GOE is able to share the benefits of the bonanza of tourism development that continues to thrive in Sinai the Bedouin population. End comment.

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